

STARBLAZER

FANTASY FICTION IN PICTURES

No. 233

30p



TOWER *of* SKULLS

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NOW ON SALE

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TOWER OF SKULLS



ON THE SORCERERS' WORLD OF KARONDA, HEART OF THE VAST EMPIRE OF THE STELLAR MAGES, STRANGE FORCES GATHERED ABOUT THE TOWER OF KAR-KEMAL, ONE OF THE LAST GREAT MAGICIANS OF THE WORLD. IN THE CITY BELOW THE PEOPLE HAD LOCKED THEMSELVES IN THEIR HOMES, SENSING THE UNLEASHING OF TERRIBLE FORCES HIGH OVERHEAD.

4

FOR SEVEN DAYS AND NIGHTS THE SORCERER HAD BEEN SEARCHING EVERY VOLUME HE HAD, KNOWING TIME WAS AGAINST HIM.

IT'S NO USE! I CAN FIND NOTHING TO PROTECT ME FROM THIS COMING EVIL.

EVEN AS HE SPOKE, THE POWERS OF EVIL INVADIED HIS DOMAIN.

SAINTS PRESERVE ME!

NO-OO!

FAR IN THE REMOTE SOUTH OF KARONDA THE RENEGADE SORCERER, ZARAKAZ, LONG BANISHED FOR HIS EVIL PRACTICES, EAGERLY RECEIVED THE PRIZE.

THE SKULL OF KAR-KEMAL!
AND WITH IT, ALL HIS
POWERS!

ANOTHER FINE
SPECIMEN TO ADD TO
THE TOWER OF SKULLS.

ONLY FOUR MORE OF THE
SORCERERS' GUILD ARE LEFT!
ONCE I HAVE DESTROYED THEM,
ALL POWER WILL BE MINE AND
ALL KARONDA WILL BOW BEFORE
ME.

IN THEIR SACRED TOWER OF
HIGHSCARP, THE LAST OF
THE SORCERERS' GUILD,
ONCE ALL-POWERFUL,
GATHERED

WE HAVE BEEN TOO SECRETTIVE
FOR TOO LONG. IT IS TIME TO
ADMIT THAT WE MUST
COMBINE OUR POWERS TO
DEFEAT ZARAKAZ — IF IT IS
POSSIBLE! I FEAR HIS EVIL
STRENGTH EXCEEDS OURS
NOW.

KAR-KEMAL'S MAGIC WAS
POWERLESS TO SAVE HIM,
JUST LIKE ALL THE OTHERS.



YES, RYDA, BUT IF WE ATTACK ZARAKAZ DIRECTLY, WE'LL BE PLAYING INTO HIS HANDS. IT WOULD SAVE HIM HAVING TO SEEK US OUT!

HE'S STARTED RECRUITING AN ARMY OF HUMAN SLAVES WITH WHICH TO BEGIN THE CONQUEST OF THE CITIES OF KARONDA.

THEIR DEBATE RAGED FOR MANY HOURS, BUT AT LAST THEY AGREED.

WE MUST INFILTRATE HIS TOWER! FOR IT IS THE SOURCE OF HIS POWER. OR SHOULD I SAY, SOMEONE MUST INFILTRATE THE TOWER. CAN WE FIND SUCH A PERSON?



FAR, FAR AWAY IN THE CITY OF EKWENDENI, MANY CITIZENS WERE LEAVING IN HASTE. AS THE BARBARIAN WARRIOR, PYTHAX, ENTERED ITS GATES, HE SAW AT ONCE THE TERROR OF THE PEOPLE AND SENSED AN ATMOSPHERE OF DESPAIR. HE WAS A MERCENARY, A LONE WOLF WHO HAD WON AND LOST SEVERAL FORTUNES. ALWAYS EAGER FOR FRESH ADVENTURE, HE HAD TRAVELLED TO FIND ANOTHER FORTUNE.



PYTHAX HAD NOT BEEN IN THE CITY
LONG BEFORE HE WAS APPROACHED.

YOU LOOKING FOR
WORK IN THE ARMY OF
ZARAKAZ THE
SORCERER?

MY AXE ISN'T FOR HIRE
TO ANY FILTHY
SORCERER.
BEGONE ... LEAVE ME
BE!

LATER, AS HE LEFT,
PYTHAX REALISED HE
HAD MADE ENEMIES.

HOI ... LOUDMOUTH —
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE
YOUR BLOOD SPILLED?



NOT A LOT! COME AND
TASTE CLEAN STEEL!

THE MERCENARY WAS A
SUPERB AXEMAN, BUT
SHEER WEIGHT OF
NUMBERS THREATENED TO
OVERCOME HIM.



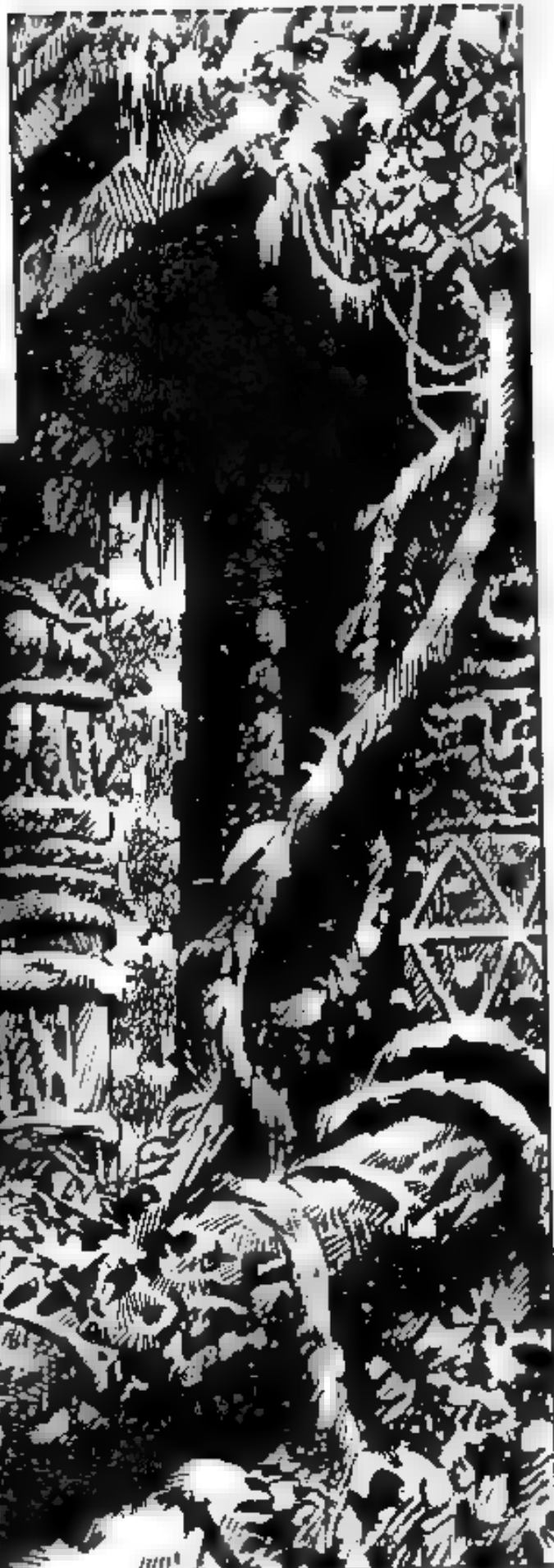
IF YOU WON'T FIGHT
FOR ZARAKAZ, THEN
DIE, SCUM!

I'D RATHER DIE
THAN SERVE HIM!



BEFORE THEY COULD FINISH
HIM, A DARK FIGURE APPEARED.

SORCERY!



THEY FLED DOWN NARROW STREETS TO A RUINED TEMPLE—

I SERVE RYDA AND THE SORCERERS' GUILD. ZARAKAZ THREATENS THE ENTIRE WORLD WITH HIS BLACK SORCERY AND INTENDS TO ENSLAVE US ALL.





IT WAS CLEAR TO PYTHAX THAT ZARAKAZ'S MINIONS MEANT TO KILL HIM WHATEVER CHOICE HE MADE.



WE AGREED TO
ACCOMPANY
RYDA'S SERVANT
OUT OF THE CITY.
SOME HOURS
LATER, DEEP IN
THE FOREST...

LISTEN!
SOMETHING
APPROACHES!

STAND ASIDE, OLD ONE... I
SHALL DEAL WITH THIS.





PUT UP YOUR AXE! THE
BEAST WILL NOT HARM US.

RYDA'S SERVANT
PRODUCED A SHIMMERING
DIadem AND THE BEAST
SEEMED FASCINATED BY IT.

THIS IS RYDA'S
STARBROW DIadem. IT
CONTROLS THE
BEASTS.

YOU DIRECT THE BEAST
THROUGH IT, AND IT WILL
PROTECT YOU FROM ZARAKAZ'S
LESSER MAGIC. IT ALSO ACTS AS
A LENS FOR THE POWER OF THE
GUILD.

I WILL NOT WORK FOR A SORCERER
— NOT EVEN A GOOD ONE.

TO PYTHAX'S SURPRISE, THE DIADEM SEEMED TO CALM HIS MIND, AND AS SOON AS HE SAT ON THE GREAT BEAST, HE FELT A THRILL OF POWER.

YOU MUST GO TO ZARAKAZ AND SEEK TO BECOME ONE OF HIS ARMY. THAT WAY YOU WON'T BE SUSPECTED. NO ONE WILL KNOW WHAT THE DIADEM CAN DO.

NO! I CANNOT!

BUT THE PURSUIT HAD ALREADY FOUND THEM.

AARRGHH!



ANGERED BY THE DEATH OF RYDA'S SERVANT, PYTHAX GAVE THE BEAST A MENTAL COMMAND.

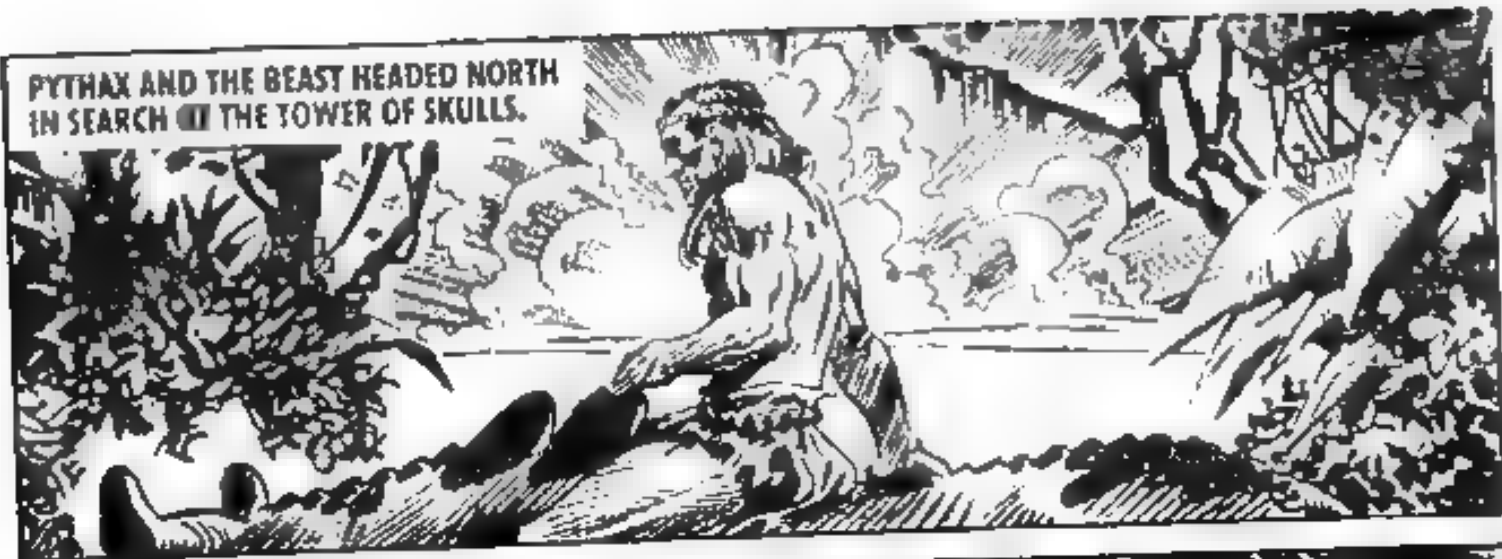


IT WAS SOON OVER—

ZARAKAZ MUST
BE DESTROYED!



PYTHAX AND THE BEAST HEADED NORTH
IN SEARCH OF THE TOWER OF SKULLS.



THE DAYS SEEMED ENDLESS AS THEY
CROSSED THE BLEACHED DESERT, THE
SMELL OF SORCERY THICK ABOUT THEM.

I LIKE THIS
NOT ONE BIT.



AND PYTHAX'S FEELINGS OF FOREBODING WERE RIGHT — THE BIZARRE DENIZENS OF THIS GHASTLY LAND WERE READY TO ATTACK.



SOON HE WAS OVERWHELMED.



O THAT THE HOODED ONE
COULD HELP!





AAIEE... POWER
FROM THE SORCERER!




BUT THE DANGER
WAS FAR FROM OVER!

KILL! KILL! KILL!



AS PYTHAX WAS ABOUT TO STRIKE DOWN THE
LAST OF THEM HE SAW THE EERIE POWER
SHINING IN ITS EYES.


A black and white comic panel. In the foreground, a close-up of an older man with a wrinkled face and a headband, looking intensely at something off-camera. In the background, a muscular, dark-skinned creature with long hair and a loincloth stands on a rocky outcrop, holding a spear.

BY THE GODS ... THIS
CREATURE WAS ONCE
HUMAN — BUT I MUST KILL
IT!

A black and white comic panel showing a close-up of a man's face. He has a headband with a circular ornament and is looking slightly to the side with a serious expression.

SOMETHING WAS
CONTROLLING
THEM — ZARAKAZ
PEHAPS?

PYTHAX WAS STARTLED BY A VOICE
BEHIND HIM.

A large black and white comic panel. On the left, a man with a headband (Pythax) is shown from the chest up, looking towards the right. On the right, a knight in full plate armor, including a helmet with a cross emblem, is shown from the waist up, holding a sword and looking back at Pythax.

WELL DONE STRANGER! YOU
FOUGHT LIKE A DESERT LION. WHAT
BRINGS YOU HERE?

THEY SAY THE SORCERER
ZARAKAZ PAYS HIS SOLDIERS
WELL.

THEY MOUNTED UP—



ALL THAT DAY THEY RODE ON, MOSTLY IN SILENCE, AND AROUND THEM PYTHAX COULD FEEL THE EYES OF OTHER WATCHERS — ALL EVIL.



HERE WE TRAIN OUR ARMY.
SOON ZARAKAZ WILL GIVE
THE WORD FOR US TO
MARCH.



THE SIZE OF THE BARRACK AREA SHOCKED
PYTHAX. THERE WAS ROOM FOR
THOUSANDS OF WARRIORS.



AS THEY REACHED A CENTRAL
CHAMBER, PYTMAN SENSED THE
DANGER THROUGH HIS DIADEM



PYTHAX WAS NOT PREPARED FOR
THE ZOMBIES VICIOUS ATTACK.

AAAARGH! UNHAND ME, YOU
UNHUMAN BEASTS!



FORGIVE ME, BUT THERE
ARE A NUMBER OF TESTS.
WE BEGIN WITH THE
INITIATION.





PYTHAX TRIED TO REACH THE MIND OF HIS BEAST THROUGH HIS DIADEM, BUT THERE WAS ONLY DARKNESS.

LOOK AT THE OCCULT JEWEL! IT WILL WASH YOUR MINDS OF ALL HUMAN THOUGHTS.

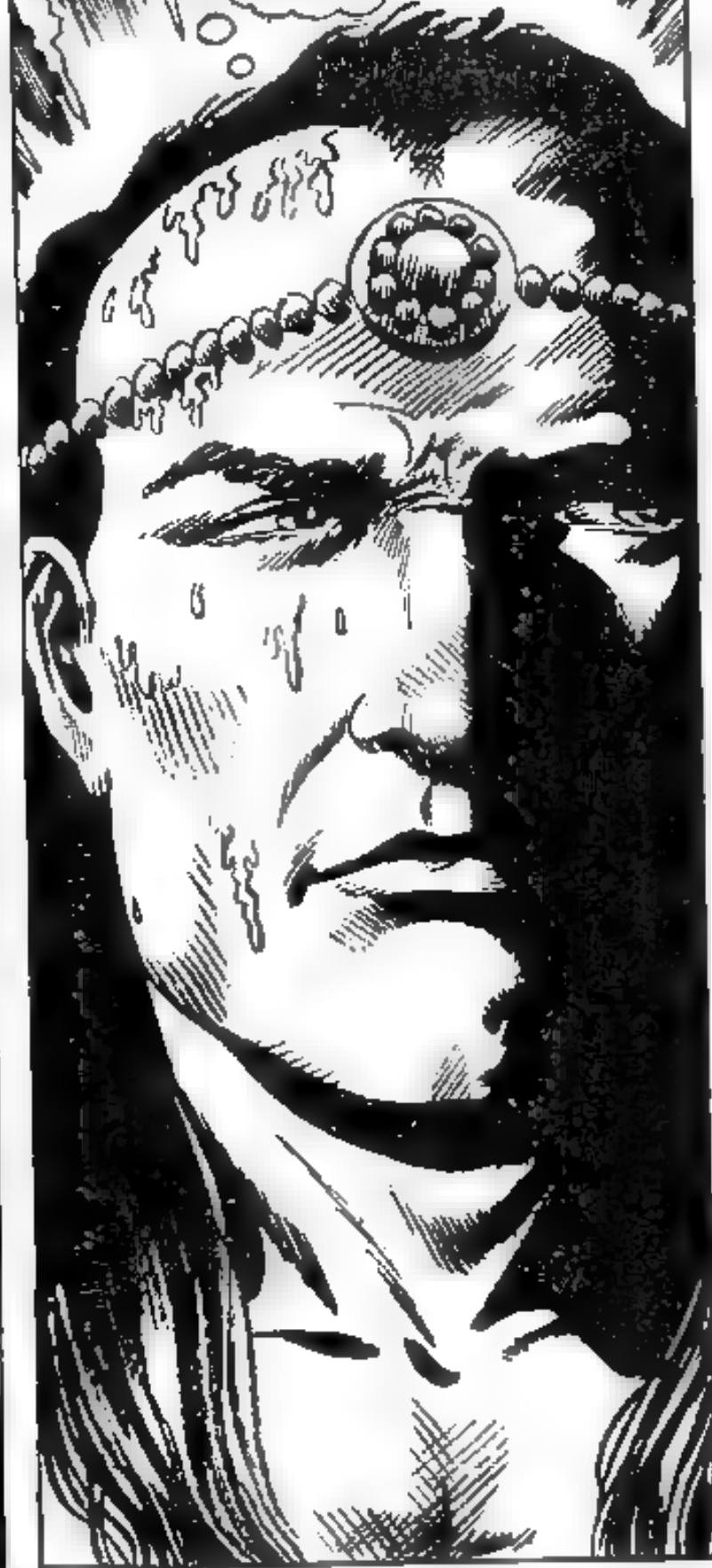
I AM DOOMED!



BUT AS THE BEAM STRUCK HIM, IT WAS
DRAWN TO THE DIADEM ON HIS BROW.



THE DIADEM! IT'S DEFLECTING
THE POWER! WHATEVER IS
MEANT TO BE HAPPENING—
ISN'T.



STUNNED, BUT UNHARMED,
PYTHAX PLAYED ALONG
WITH GRAAN.

ARE YOU READY TO
SERVE THE MASTER?

I AM READY TO
SERVE THE MASTER.



HIS CAPTORS SAID NOTHING AS THEY LOCKED HIM IN HIS CELL.



TOMORROW WE TEST OUR
STRENGTH FOR THE DIVINE
ZARAKAZ, THEN TAKE OUR
PLACE IN HIS ARMY.



I AM KARZA, AND I WILL
BE ZARAKAZ'S
GREATEST WARRIOR!
GIVE ME THAT JEWEL!







MORNING CAME...

RISE...
ALL RISE!

BEFORE YOU TAKE YOUR
PLACE IN THE ARMY OF THE
MASTER, YOU MUST SHOW
YOUR WORTH. ARE YOU TO
BE A COMMON FOOT
SOLDIER, OR WILL YOU
MAKE A ROYAL GUARD?
HERE WE WILL ASSESS
YOU.

AN ARENA! SO
THIS IS THE TEST.



AND IN THE LONG MORNING'S ORDEAL
BEGAN. PYTHAX FOUGHT WITH HIS BARE
HANDS...



...KNIVES...



...SWORDS...



... UNTIL HE SEEMED TO BE THE ONLY
ONE LEFT ALIVE IN THE ARENA.

YOUR LAST TEST AWAITS YOU.
CHOOSE WHATEVER WEAPON YOU
LIKE.



ONLY TWO OF YOU HAVE
SURVIVED THIS FAR. YOUR
OPPONENT APPROACHES.



PYTHAX SAW AT ONCE
THE MISSING DIADEM.



KARZA!





THE BATTLE WAS LONG
AND EXHAUSTING.



BUT AT LAST ...

DIE, BRUTE!



I CLAIM MY SPOILS!





PYTHAX WAS SHOWN WHAT
HE WAS TO GUARD.

AT LAST! THE TOWER
OF SKULLS . . .

YOUR FIRST TASK IS SIMPLE.
TAKE THE NIGHT WATCH AT THE
BASE OF TOWER. DO NOT CLIMB
OR ENTER IT.

NO ONE HAS PASSED THIS
WAY FOR MANY AN HOUR.







PYTHAX WAS TAKEN TO ZARAKAZ —



AS III WAS DRAGGED AWAY, PYTHAX
HEARD THE MANIACAL LAUGHTER OF THE SORCERER.

I KNEW NO GOOD WOULD
COME OF FIGHTING
SORGERY.



PYTHAX WAS TAKEN FAR FROM THE
TOWER TO A CAVERN DEEP BELOW THE
MOUNTAINS.

DIE, SCUM!



HE LANDED HEAVILY—



THE BEAST PENSE
THEY'LL TRAMPLE ME.

BUT, SUDDENLY, PYTHAX'S BEAST
RUSHED IN FRONT OF THE ADVANCING
ANIMALS.



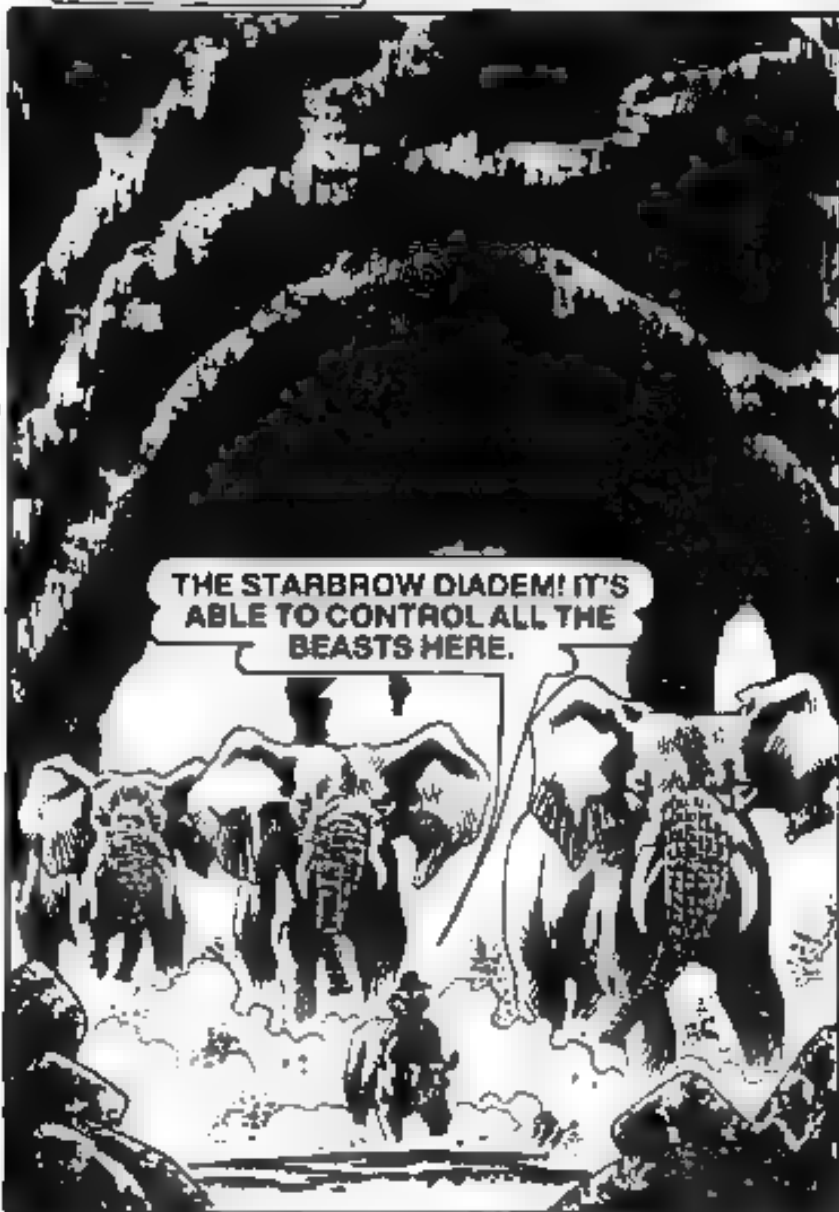
MY BEAST . . . HE SEEMS TO
CALM THE OTHERS' RAGE.
EVEN HE MUST HAVE BEEN
GIVEN SOME STRANGE
POWERS BY THE
SORCERORS.

PYTHAX WORKED HIS BONDS FREE —



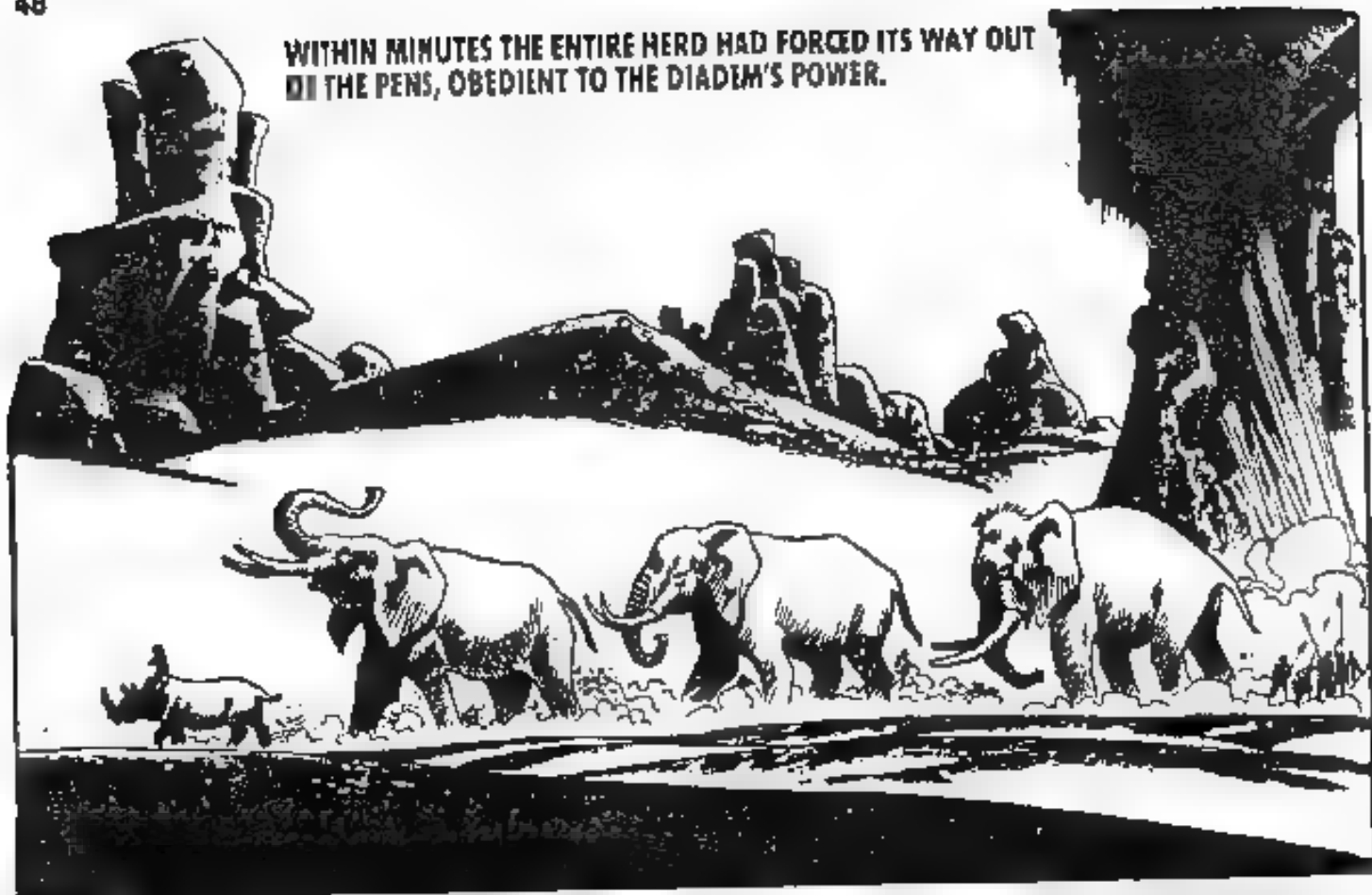
**BEAST... THANK
YOU. ZARAKAZ
DIDN'T EXPECT ME TO
SURVIVE THIS.**

**THE STARBROW DIADEM! IT'S
ABLE TO CONTROL ALL THE
BEASTS HERE.**

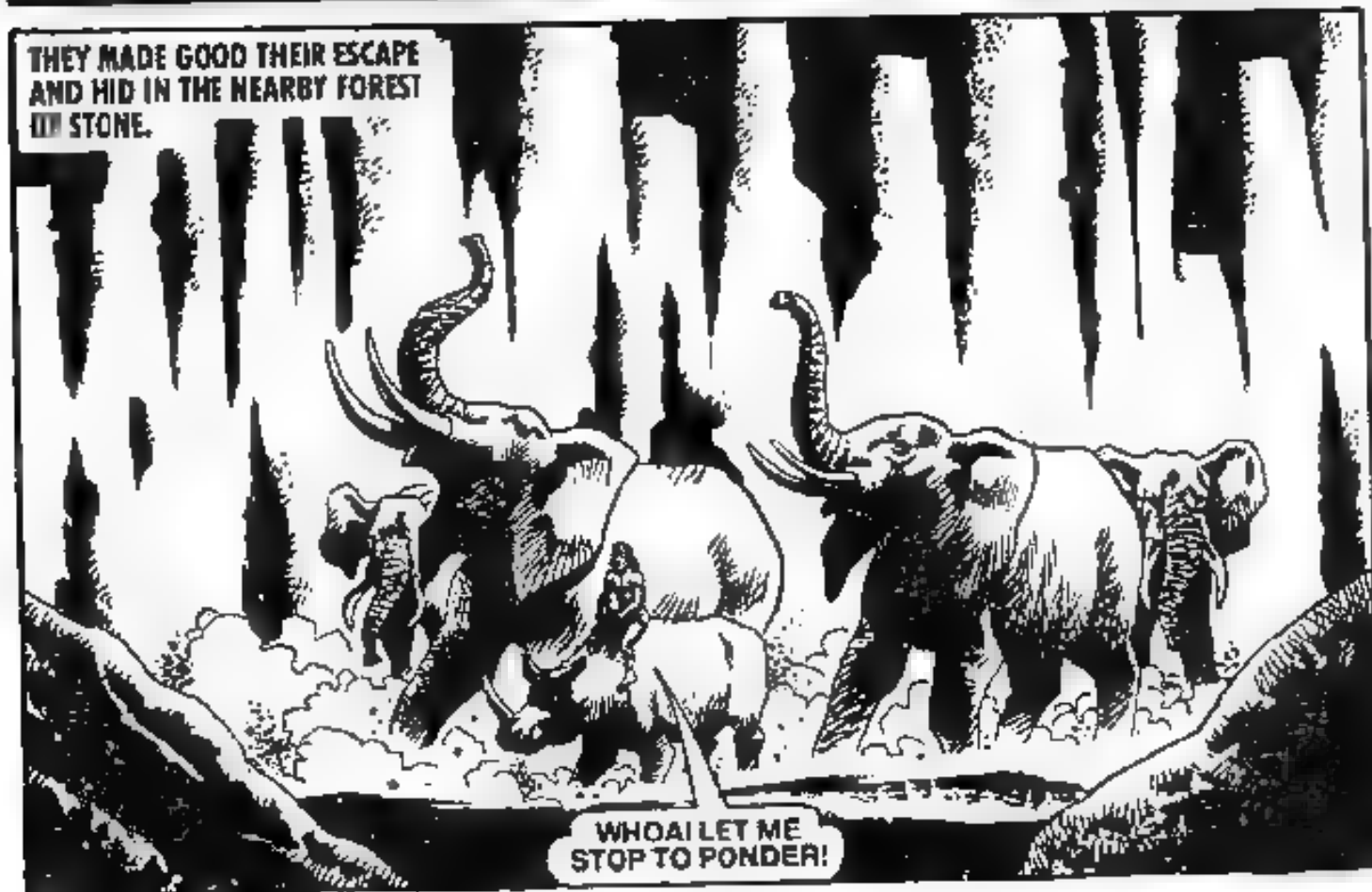


**AS A UNIT, THE BEASTS
WILL BE UNSTOPPABLE!**

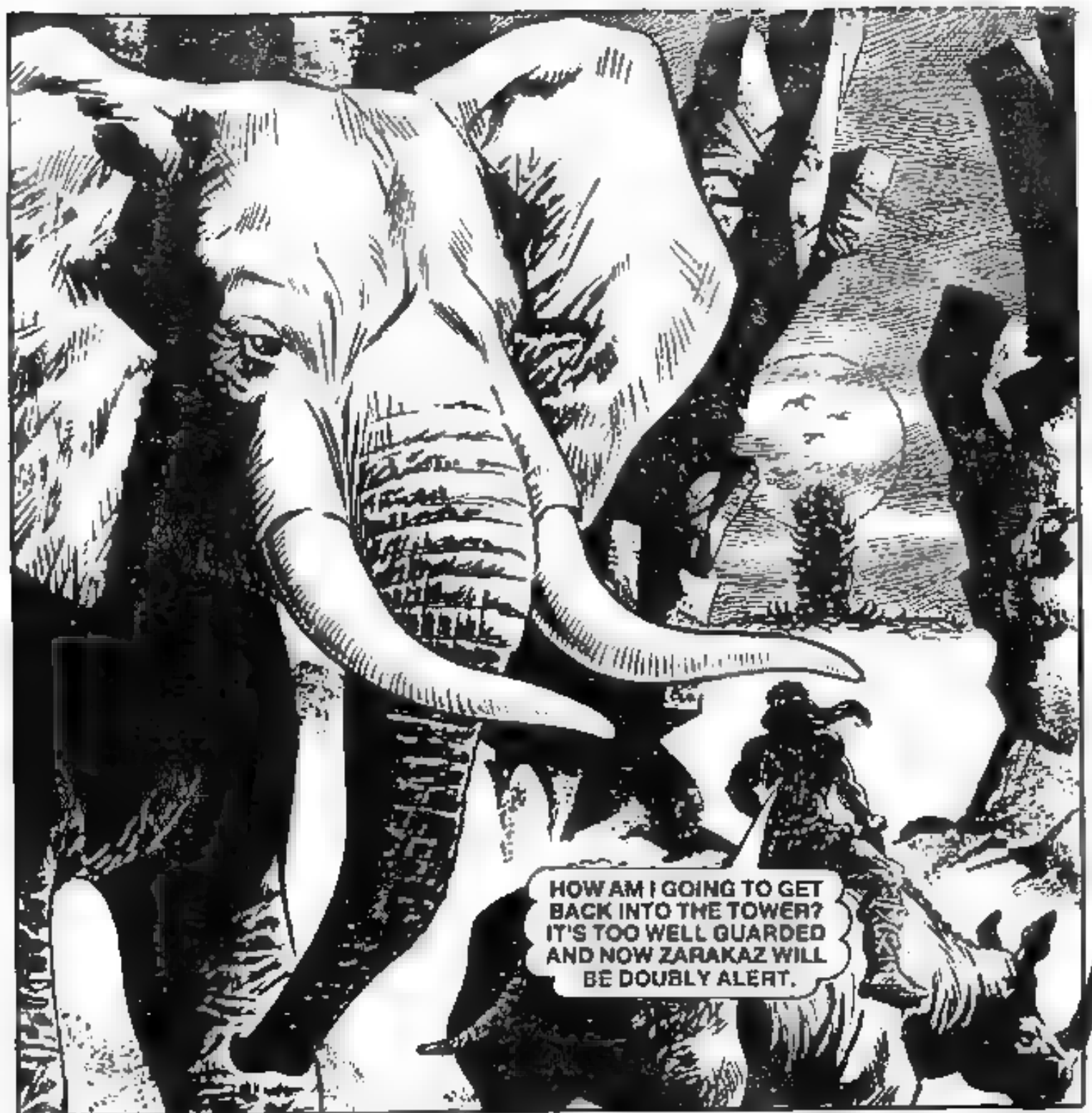
WITHIN MINUTES THE ENTIRE HERD HAD FORCED ITS WAY OUT
OF THE PENS, OBEYING TO THE DIADIM'S POWER.



THEY MADE GOOD THEIR ESCAPE
AND HID IN THE NEARBY FOREST
OF STONE.



WHO! LET ME
STOP TO PONDER!

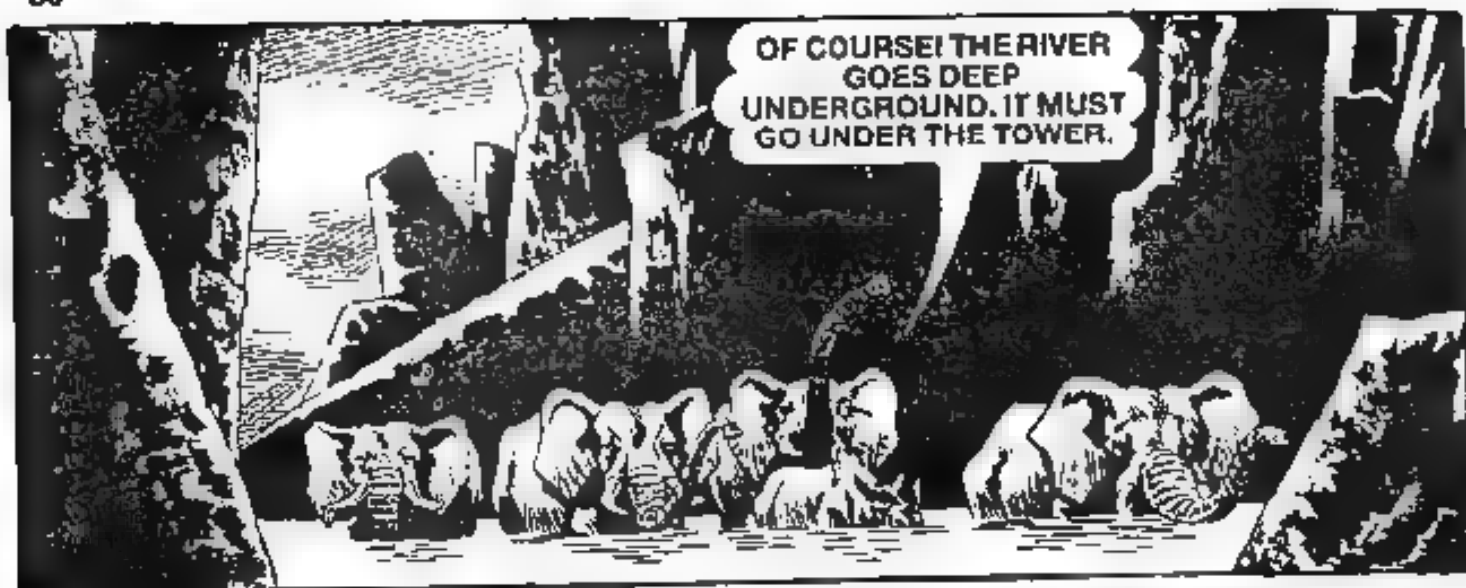


HOW AM I GOING TO GET
BACK INTO THE TOWER?
IT'S TOO WELL GUARDED
AND NOW ZARAKAZ WILL
BE DOUBLY ALERT.


HE FELT THE PROBING MIND OF HIS BEAST.



BEAST . . . WHAT ARE
YOU TRYING TO TELL
ME? THE WATER? WHAT
OF THE WATER?



THEY COULD HEAR THE ROAR OF THE RIVER FAR BELOW AS THEY PASSED THROUGH THE OPENING —



THE DIADEM DID NOT PLAY ME FALSE. THIS LEDGE FOLLOWS THE COURSE OF THE RIVER.



AUGH! SOME FOUL CREATURE OF THE BLACKNESS!



PYTHAX AND HIS
STRANGE ALLIES PRESSED
ON, UNTIL—



THEN—

THE DIADEM . . . IT BIDS ME
HALT. WE ARE RIGHT
BELOW THE TOWER OF
SKULLS!

BUT PYTHAX SEARCHED LONG AND
HARD WITH NO SUCCESS—

THESE STRANGE
COLUMNS — LIKE THE
RIBS OF SOME
GIGANTIC BEAST —
THEY HOLD UP THE
TOWER. NOW I MUST
FIND A WAY UP.

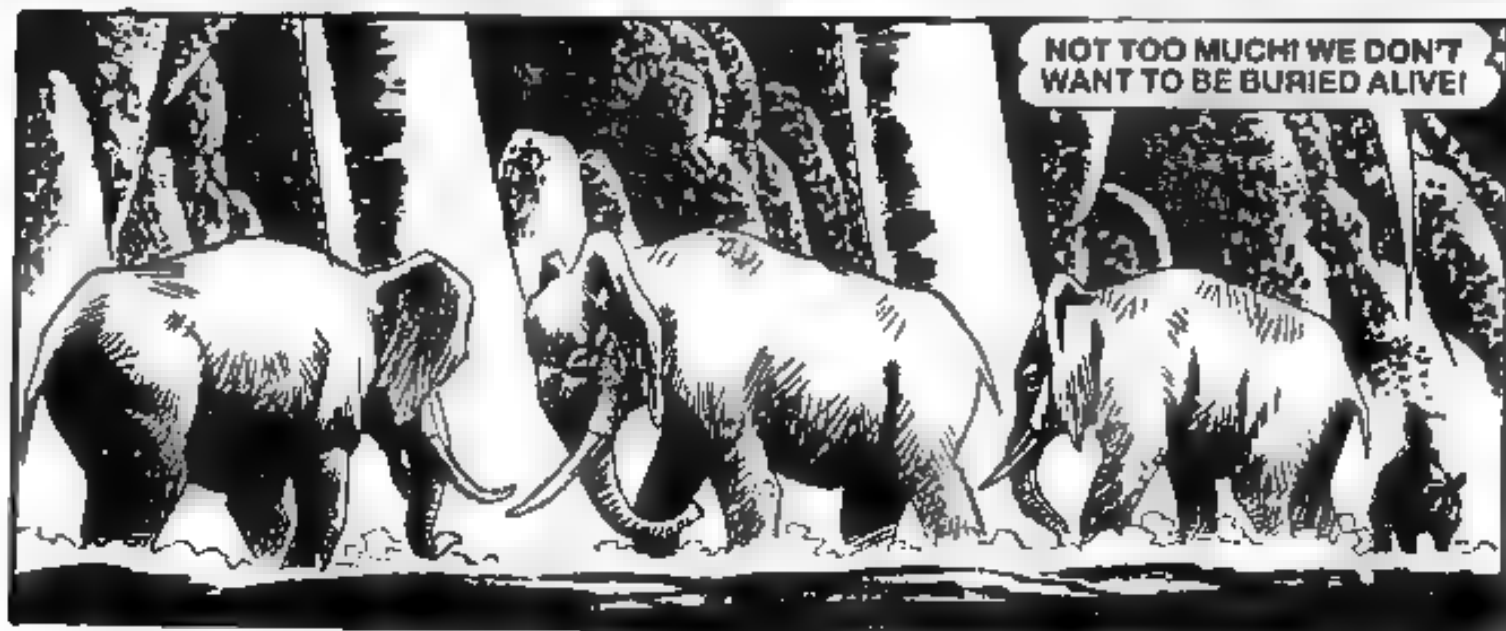
HERE IS THE RIVER, BUT
STILL I SEE NO WAY INTO
THE TOWER.

AS PYTHAX LOOKED ABOUT, A
BEAM OF SUNLIGHT BROKE
THROUGH A FISSURE—

THAT BEAM... THE
DIADEM. MAYBE WE
CAN WEAKEN SOME OF
THESE MAIN
COLUMNS...


THE DIADEM CONCENTRATED THE POWER OF THE SUN... AND —

IT WORKS...






WITHIN MINUTES THE FLOOD
HAD SPREAD INTO THE HUGE
CAVERN.



THAT'S ENOUGH! LET
THE WATER DO THE
REST. LET'S GET OUT!



THE WATER IS
BUILDING UP! PERHAPS
I'VE BEEN TOO CLEVER.

WHAT IS HAPPENING?
THE TOWER IS SHAKING.



HAVE WE
SUCCEEDED?



FAR FROM THE TOWER, ZOMBIE SOLDIERS
IN THE BARRACKS HEARD AND SAW
THE DESTRUCTION.

THE TOWER! WHO DARES
ATTACK OUR MASTER'S TEMPLE?

COME, BEAST AND FRIENDS . . . IT'S
KILL OR BE KILLED.

THE EVIL SORCEROR'S MINDLESS HORDES MARCHED ON HEEDLESS OF THE CARNAGE.



**SO THE BARBARIAN
STILL LIVES! NO
MATTER! MY ARMY
SHALL START ANOTHER
TOWER WITH HIS
SKULL.**



**STILL THEY MARCH TO THEIR
DOOM. I MUST HOLD THEM
BACK SOMEHOW TILL I CAN
REACH ZARAKAZ.**

THE DIADEM ONCE AGAIN CONCENTRATED
THE POWER OF THE SUN CAUSING THE
WATER TO BOIL ...

STOP HIM!



ZARAKAZ'S WARRIORS SCREAMED IN
TORMENT AS THEY WERE ENVELOPED IN
THE SCALDING STEAM.

RUN LIKE THE WIND,
BEAST. I SHALL HAVE ONLY
ONE CHANCE.

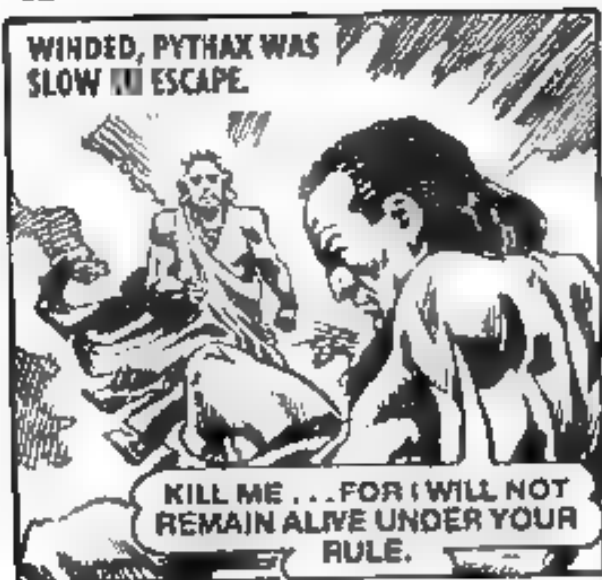


BUT HE DIDN'T GET FAR —

FOOL! HOW DARE YOU
CHALLENGE ME.



Winded, Pythax was slow to escape.



KILL ME . . . FOR I WILL NOT REMAIN ALIVE UNDER YOUR RULE.

EVEN AS ZARAKAZ CLOSED IN TO KILL PYTHAX, BEAST PREPARED TO CHARGE.



PAHI A BASE ANIMAL DEFIES ME . . . I SHALL BURN IT . . . THEN YOU.



YOU GIVE US A CHANCE, BEAST. MAY MY AIM BE TRUE.





THE SKULL OF A LONG-DEAD FOE
SMASHED AGAINST ZARAKAZ'S NECK.





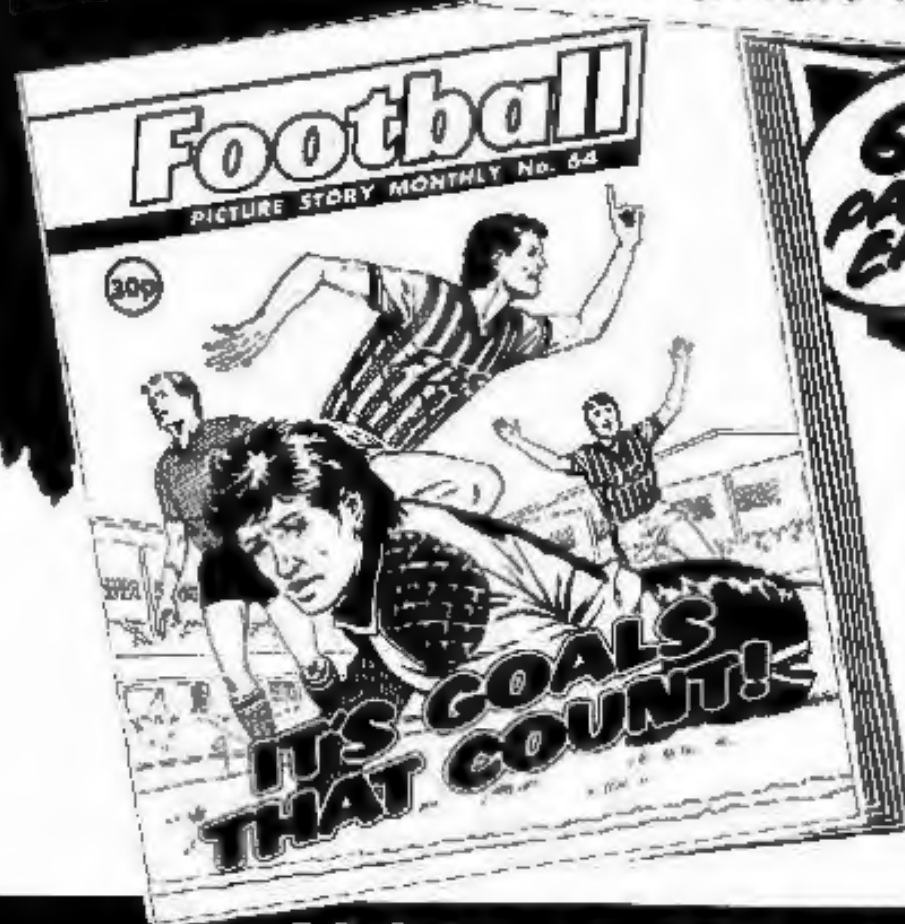
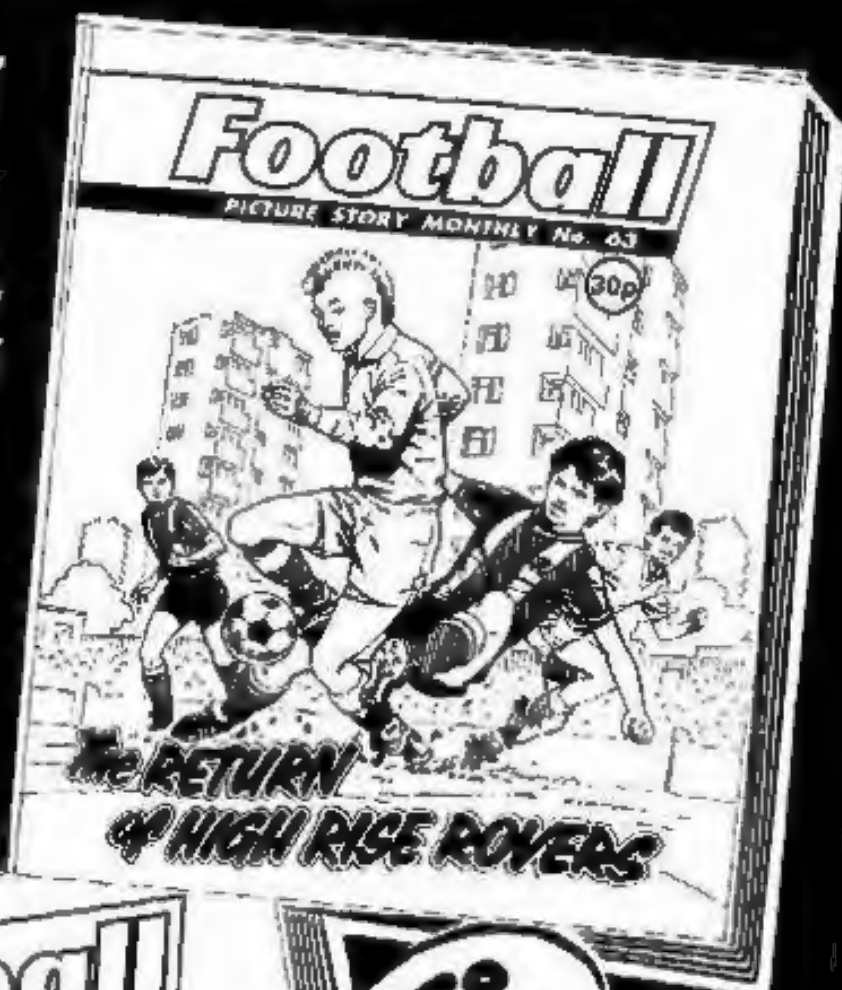
WITH THE DEATH OF ZARAKAZ, THE EVIL POWER
THAT BOUND THE TOWER OF SKULLS TOGETHER,
WAS NO MORE. AND WITH THE POWER GONE,
THE ZOMBIE ARMY CRUMBLLED TO DUST.





AND SO PYTHAX THE BARBARIAN LEFT THE SCENE OF HIS VICTORY, DETERMINED NEVER TO SERVE A SORCERER AGAIN.

**IF YOU'RE
A
FOOTBALL
FAN, YOU
CAN'T
AFFORD
TO MISS
THESE!**



**68
PAGES
EACH**

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TOWER OF SKULLS

Pythax the Mercenary came from his home in the Norlands to seek fame and fortune in the troubled Kingdom of Karonda. But if he'd known the trouble was caused by a struggle between the powers of light and darkness to gain control, not only of Karonda, but men's souls, he might have preferred to stay at home. As it was, his fate, and the future of Karonda lay in the Tower of Skulls . . . if he could defeat the denizens of evil that guarded it.

